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A
REPLY
TO A
LETTER

Directed to the
MINISTER of *Moffat*,
Concerning the
Positive Institutions
OF
CHRISTIANITY.

IN WHICH

The Arguments in Mr. WALLACE'S Sermon before the Synod of *Dumfries*, *October* 1729, and the Remarks prefix'd to it, are illustrated and defended.

By ROBERT WALLACE,
Minister of the Gospel at *Moffat*.

L O N D O N:

Printed for A. MILLAR, at *Buchanan's-Head*,
against St. *Clement's-Church* in the Strand.
M. DCC. XXXII.

REPLY
TO A
LETTER

Directed to the

MINISTER OF APOSTOLIC

Concerning the

Positive Infringements

OF

CHRISTIANITY



The Arguments
from before the House of Commons
October 1799, and the Remarks prefixed
to it are illustrated and defended.

By ROBERT WALLACE,
Minister of the Gospel at Belfast.

LONDON

Printed for A. Mitchell, at Broomfield-Hall,
against St. George's Church in the Strand.
MDCCLXXXIX.



A
R E P L Y
T O

A LETTER *directed to the Minister of Moffat, concerning the positive Institutions of Christianity.*

S I R,

AS you have been pleased to direct a Letter to me, containing Remarks on the Sermon I have lately publish'd; I think it proper to give you the following Reply. I confess you have started several Subjects, which might give occasion to large Discourses: but as they have no particular relation to my Sermon or Preface, I do not incline to consider them in a Letter of this kind. Remarking on particular Treatises, is generally tedious and disagreeable; and there is a Disadvantage

B in

in being confin'd to a Plan, and tied down to a Train of thinking, that is rather pointed out by another than freely chosen by a Man himself. For my own part, if I was to make a larger Discourse on this Subject of divine Revelation, I would chuse to form it according to some other Model, in which I might digest my Thoughts after my own fancy, and in a manner free and unconfined. You will therefore pardon me, that I give you but a short Answer; and confine myself almost entirely to consider the Subjects of your Letter, only as they relate to my Sermon and Preface.

In doing this, I hope you will find nothing but Candour and Ingenuity, and a Disposition ready to hearken to your Objections with Calmness and Impartiality. I am equally liable to Mistakes with the rest of Mankind, and it's reasonable I should attend to every Man, who is so kind as to correct them without Rudeness and Ill-nature.

In examining your Letter, I find little to complain of, that relates to myself: there is an Expression indeed, I think you might have spar'd; for when you tell me, that " You will not say I give up several things that are strenuously insisted on by my Brethren;" some perhaps may take this as a hint, that I give up several things that ought not to be yielded by a Minister of the Gospel: But I cannot believe you could design such

such a disadvantageous Insinuation, when there was no necessity, and I had given you no ground. For you could never suppose, that I design'd my Sermon or Preface as a complete Confession of my Faith, or a Publication of all the Truths I believ'd : nor can I see a good reason for putting me so often in mind of the Opinions of my Brethren, and those of my Communion. But whatever you intended by it, I'll take this occasion of assuring you ; that as I did not appear in that Performance to be of any particular Party of Christians, nor design'd to defend the peculiar Principles of any of the different Churches of Christians ; so I do not resolve to interest myself in Controversies of this kind, unless as a Mediator and Reconciler, till I see the general Interest of Christianity on a better footing. Such Controversies are not at all to my humour or taste : for I am much more inclined to unite than divide ; and am of opinion, that the bad Management of the Controversies among Christians, and the Keeness with which many have appear'd in defence of their particular Churches and Communions, is one great Reason of the distress to which the Christian Cause in general is reduced.

But passing Preliminaries, let us come close to the Argument. The first thing that occurs in your Letter, relates to the Obscurity of the sacred Writings. I endeavour'd to take off

the Objection made to the Christian Revelation on the head of Obscurity; and alledg'd, That a Book may be obscure in respect of many particular Passages, and yet such things as are of chief importance, and for the sake of which the Book is render'd highly valuable, may be clearly deliver'd: and I contended, that this was the case of the sacred Writings. And you seem to agree with me so far, that if these Writings were presented to us only as a human Performance, you would acknowledge the Observation to be just, and a sufficient Vindication of Scripture from the Objection of Obscurity: but you argue, " That the sacred Writings are presented to us as divinely inspir'd, and that their Perspicuity is appeal'd to as a Character of their divine Original; which makes the case widely different: for tho' Writings merely human may be imperfect in their Frame, and either be written obscurely at first, or become obscure in length of time, thro' Causes which no human Foresight could prevent; this cannot decently be pleaded in behalf of Writings divinely inspir'd: And because the sacred Writings do not, as you imagine, distinguish themselves by their Perspicuity, or the excellent Manner of their Composition, you think this is a great difficulty, in a way of mere human Reason, to believe them inspir'd of God." This I take to be the

the full force of what you object: let us examine its Strength.

And in the first place, I may observe, that as I did not in my Preface or Sermon build upon the divine Inspiration of the sacred Writings, but only considered them as Writings in which there are accounts of the merciful Designs of Heaven concerning Sinners; so if I should now allow, for Argument's sake, that they are not divinely inspired, but only the Writings of good and honest Men, who wrote as well as they could, tho' without any extraordinary Assistance from Heaven; upon this Supposition you must give up this point, and acknowledge that my Vindication is just: or rather you have given it up already; since you confess that what I observ'd to vindicate the sacred Writings from Obscurity, affords a sufficient Vindication of any Performance that is purely human.

Nor is there any thing to hinder a Christian defending his Religion against the Deists, to consider the sacred Writings only in this light; as several have actually done. For whatever Christians believe concerning the divine Inspiration of these Writings; I cannot see the necessity of supposing their Inspiration, in order to establish the Christian Scheme against the Deists: for there is a plain Distinction betwixt a Religion's being divine, and the Books which contain the Doctrines of this Religion being divinely inspired; and it's possible one
may

may be firmly persuaded of one of these, who can by no means admit the other.

Nor will it make any alteration in the Argument, tho' you suppose that the sacred Writings are divinely inspired; for you can infer nothing from their Inspiration, either about their Perspicuity or Perfection, until you determine the purpose and design of God in inspiring the Writers of them. If God hath inspired them, you may safely conclude, that his end shall be gain'd: but that these Writings must be perfectly clear, or that they must be compos'd according to the greatest Accuracy and Perfection of the Art of writing, can never be concluded, until it be determined in what degree of perfection Heaven designed them to be compos'd. Now the designs of God in inspiring a Person in writing a Book, may be various: he may either design to secure him from committing gross Mistakes, or falling into fundamental Errors; or to secure him from all Mistakes whatsoever: he may design that the Book should be perfectly clear and perspicuous; and further perhaps, that it should be compos'd according to the utmost Perfection of Art: Such may be the various designs of Heaven: and before you make the Obscurity of Writings, or the Imperfection of their composure, an Objection against their Inspiration; you must first determine in what degree Heaven must have design'd them to be perfect and perspicuous.

Now

Now in determining this, you must either proceed on what Christians actually confess, and argue against them from their own Concessions; or you must oblige them to make such Concessions, as are proper for your purpose: but in neither of these methods will you succeed.

For in the first place, you will find yourself mistaken with respect to the general opinion of Christians concerning the Perspicuity of Scripture: for it is not commonly alledg'd, as you pretend, " That a Piece which
 " is divinely inspir'd may be expected to distinguish itself by its great Evidence and
 " Perspicuity:" on the contrary, Christians commonly acknowledge that there are several obscure Passages in the Scriptures. What the *Westminster* Confession of Faith lays down about their Perspicuity, is in these words:
 " All things in Scripture are not alike plain
 " in themselves, nor alike clear unto all;
 " yet those things which are necessary to be
 " known, believed and observed for Salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened
 " in some place of Scripture or other, that
 " not only the Learned but the Unlearned,
 " in a due use of the ordinary means, may
 " attain unto a sufficient understanding of
 " them." And I reckon this is agreeable, in the main, to what Protestants generally maintain; by which you will perceive, that they do not attribute any extraordinary degree of Perspicuity

cuity to the sacred Writings: and therefore you must not have considered the Subject exactly, when you insinuate, pag. 4. " That the " extraordinary Perspicuity of Scripture is appeal'd to, as a Character of its divine Original." If any Christian make this Appeal, I will venture to assert, he is so far but a very injudicious Defender of the Christian Cause.

But perhaps it may be alledged, That whatever degree of Inspiration is actually attributed to the sacred Books by Christians, it is reasonable to conclude, that if God inspires a Person to write a Book, he cannot design less than to make it perfectly intelligible; since nothing less can be supposed worthy the care of Heaven: and therefore if there be any Book presented to us as inspired, which is not perspicuous to this degree, this is a sure Mark that it is not inspired.

This indeed is an Argument against the Inspiration of the Scriptures; but it is a very weak one: since we may easily suppose, that the Design of Heaven reaches not so far; and that a Book may be inspir'd, tho' all things in it are not perfectly intelligible at all times. One would expect indeed, that all the Points of the greatest moment, for which the Revelation was chiefly afforded, or all things necessary to Salvation, as the *Westminster* Confession expresses it, should be so clearly reveal'd, that every honest Reader should be able to understand them: but if
this

this is the case, it's not to be reckon'd a valid Objection, that such things as are of lesser moment are not perfectly understood at all times: for what is unintelligible in the present age, may either have been very well understood in times past, or the knowledge of it may be reserv'd for some future period, when the understanding of it clearly may be of greater advantage to the world. Nor can it be shown unworthy of Heaven, to order a Writing in such a manner, that what is not fit to be disclosed in one age, cannot be understood till the Revolutions of the World, and the Transactions and Circumstances of Nations, shall discover these latent Truths, in that very age in which it is proper they should be known: nor can it be proved, that there must be no Obscurities in a Religion that is reveal'd; but by a like method of arguing it may be shown, that there can be no Obscurities in Morality or natural Religion.

Now if there may be Obscurities in the sacred Writings, notwithstanding their Inspiration; for this very reason, there may be apparent Defects in their Composition; if we are to judge of them in a way of mere human Art: And if it was not the Design of Heaven, that they should be free from all Obscurity, it could never be the Design of Heaven, that they should be free from all seeming Defects; since Obscurity seems always a Defect, and one of the chief Rules

in all Compositions consider'd abstractly, is, that they be clear and perspicuous. Perhaps indeed there may be Writings, which must in some measure be obscure, to answer the end propos'd; in which case, Obscurity is rather an advantage than a defect. But if this is allowed in other Writings, there is no reason why it may not be claimed in the present case; and we may maintain with equal Justice, that the Obscurity of the Scriptures is not a Blemish, but rather an Advantage upon the whole.

And indeed, when we are considering the Composure of inspired Writings, tho' it's certain, that such Writings must be exactly suited to answer the Design of Heaven, and in this Sense must be perfect in their Composition; (since the Perfection of any Writing consists in being exactly calculated to carry on the Design that is intended) yet there is no necessity that such Writings should be perfect, according to what may be reckon'd the nicest Rules of human Eloquence. Perhaps it may be more agreeable to the purpose of Heaven, to leave the Writers to express themselves in their own manner, and in a simple and artless Method; than to inspire them to compose their Narration according to the greatest Accuracy of Art. And if this may be the case; then "That a Man of tolerable Genius and Learning might have deliver'd the things contain'd in these
I " Wri-

“ Writings to as good if not to far better
 “ purpose,” * if by this is meant only that
 he “ might have express’d them more a-
 “ greeably to the Rules of Art and the ni-
 “ cest Models of human Eloquence ;” can-
 not be a valid Objection ; until it be proved,
 that it must have been the Design of Heaven
 in inspiring Writings, that every thing in
 them should be exactly adjusted to the finest
 Rules of Art, and in this respect should ap-
 pear superior to all human Composition. Now
 as Christians do not plead this, so they can
 never be obliged to confess it ; since we may
 suppose God might have a very noble De-
 sign in inspiring the sacred Writers, tho’ he
 had no intention to enable them to express
 themselves according to the nicest Rules of
 human Eloquence.

At the same time we may assert, and it has
 been affirmed by competent Judges, that there
 are passages in these Writers which come up
 to the highest Ideas of Perfection ; not only
 with respect to the Sentiments, but the Ex-
 pression and Manner of Composition : and are
 equal or superior to the most sublime Passages
 of the noblest Authors.

But to proceed to another of your Re-
 marks.

As Christianity has been alledged to be the
 Cause of many Calamities, I insisted upon two
 things for removing this Objection.

First, That it could never be prov'd that Christianity has been the Cause of more Mischiefs than Good ; without which, the Objection was not of sufficient weight.

Secondly, That it was not really the Cause, but only the innocent Occasion of any Evil at all. But neither of these gives you Satisfaction.

The first Answer, according to you, tends to destroy all Moral Evidence : and the second is by no means true ; and tho' it were, it's nothing to the purpose.

For though we cannot compute what is particular in every Man, both as to his inward Temper and outward Conversation, yet we can judge of things in gross, and say that one Nation is happy, and another not ; in one Learning prevails, in another Ignorance. And if Conclusions of this kind be not allowed, all Evidence , that is short of Demonstration, is discarded. Thus you attack my first Answer.

But granting that in many cases we can judge of things in gross, tho' frequently our Conclusions of this sort are very precarious ; must it not be granted likewise, that there are many cases so involv'd thro' the perplexity of Circumstances, that it's altogether impossible to judge of them : or tho' we may be abundantly satisfy'd in our own minds, without entering into a Detail ; yet, without this, it will be impossible to convince an Antagonist. And since a Detail is impossible, arguing

guing from such Topics is altogether in vain; for different Parties will always differ, and if ever they are convinced it must be by other arguments. All this must necessarily be granted; for there are many cases in which the Circumstances are infinite on both sides: and perhaps the very case before us affords us an example; for both the advantages and disadvantages of Christianity are in a manner infinite, which may give occasion to endless debates, without ever bringing the point to a decision. Indeed when I consider the subject in my own mind, I am persuaded that Christianity has had most excellent effects on great numbers who have embraced it, in refining their Natures and reforming their Manners; and as I am a little inclin'd to some Tenets of the ancient *Stoics*, if they are not carried too far, I am persuaded that this does much more than balance the external calamities and mischiefs it has been made the occasion of: for I sincerely believe, that the Happiness of rational Creatures and their finest Enjoyments, depend more upon the inward Temper than external Circumstances; and I approve much of the ancient division of *Epictetus* into the “τα ἐφ’ ἡμῖν” and the “τα ἔκ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν,” and think the sincerest enjoyments flow chiefly from the “τα ἐφ’ ἡμῖν.” But as the good effects of this kind are liable to be imputed to various causes, as Men affect and are dis-

posed

posed; I would not chuse to argue with a Deist from such Topics: Tho' the Deists must allow, that these inward effects cannot but be of considerable moment in this subject, yet they will chiefly insist on the visible effects; and I find you express yourself in this manner, when you assert, " That
 " the face of things has been visibly alter'd
 " to the worse, in all the Countries where
 " Christianity has obtained."

Now if we enquire into the visible effects, we shall find them infinite; and that this is a point which can never be decided to the mutual satisfaction of Christians and Deists: for Deists will alledge the implacable Hatred, Persecution, and Bloodshed, with which the different Parties of Christians have raged against one another; nor can Christians deny this charge; but they will pretend on the other hand, not only that many particular persons have received great benefit by Christianity, but that vast Tracts of the World have been polished and refined by means of the Christian Religion: again, Christians will plead, that tho' many calamities have happen'd in Christian Times, and been brought about by Christian Hands; yet they are not the natural consequences of Christianity, nor are they at all the effects of it, in any other sense than as any one thing may be said to be the effect of another, if they chance to happen about the same time; but that these
 Ca-

Calamities are wholly owing to other causes. On the other hand, Deists will not allow that the polishing particular Persons, or of vast Tracts of the World in Christian Times, and by Christian Hands, has been in any considerable degree the effect of Christianity. And thus one shall never be able to discuss a subject of this nature, to the satisfaction of both Parties. For my own part, I freely confess, I cannot pretend to so much knowledge of ancient and modern times, and to have such a distinct view of the different Faces of the World at these times, as to be able to convince an Antagonist on this head: and that I may not appear too modest, I affirm, this requires a greater Knowledge than any man in the World ought to pretend to, or history is able to afford: and therefore I must confess, I take it to be one of the boldest Assertions that ever I saw, when you affirm, *p. 6, and 7.* “ That the face of things has been visibly
 “ alter’d to the worse in all those Countries
 “ where this Religion (meaning Christianity)
 “ has obtain’d, from the time that it prevail’d
 “ in them.” This is an Assertion that I deny, nor can any man in the world make it good. It is especially inexcusable in a *Briton*; if it had dropt from an *Italian*, or a poor slavish Inhabitant of the *Lesser Asia*, greater allowances might have been made: but it’s scarce pardonable in a *British* Subject, whose Country has flourish’d so much, and where the
 face

face of things hath been visibly alter'd for the better, since the introduction of Christianity.

You have another Assertion very much akin to it, " That the Zeal of Christians has produc'd more fatal Effects than any other religious Belief; yea, than any other Cause whatever, as far as we know any thing of the History of the World." This is what Christians will always deny, and tell you with good reason, you will never be able to prove it. I'll point you out another Cause, that has done twice as much mischief as the Zeal of Christians; Tyranny and absolute Government, and the uncontroulable Power of Sovereigns: If you had duly consider'd what Calamities this has produc'd in *Italy* and *Greece*, and other Countries; I presume you would not have imputed so much to the Zeal of Christians. But tho' I should grant you not only that the Zeal of Christians, but even that Christianity itself has done more mischief than any other Cause; I do not see what advantage it could bring to your Argument: for if it has also produc'd more good than any other Cause, and if this good does more than balance the mischief; both which may be true tho' your Assertion be granted, that it has produc'd so much mischief would not be a sufficient Objection against it.

And this is enough to make it appear, that the Objection drawn from the Mischiefs
and

and Calamities Christianity has occasion'd, cannot be made good ; since the Circumstances are what we may call infinite : and we may safely assert, without invalidating moral Evidence, that no Man can go thro' with them to any good purpose.

But next you observe, I gave another Answer to this Objection, " That whatever Mischiefs have followed on Christianity, they cannot justly be ascrib'd to the Genius of the Christian Religion ; and if these bad effects have happen'd only by the abuse of it, this proves no more but that the best things in the world may be perverted and abus'd."

And indeed I cannot help thinking that is a good Answer : I think it's extremely hard to impute such Consequences to Christianity, as are not the natural Effects of it, but the greatest Abuses of it, and directly contrary to its native Tendency. But here you object, that neither is this Assertion true ; nor any thing to the purpose.

First, It's not true ; since these Mischiefs and Calamities are actually the native Consequences of Christianity, and they flow from the stress it lays upon mere Belief and Orthodoxy. But whatever be in this, in the second place, it's nothing to the purpose : for if these mischiefs have actually follow'd on Christianity, whether they be call'd the genuine Effects of it or not, yet if they have actually

ally followed it, it is sufficient, and shows, that Christianity cannot be from God: for since God is infinitely wise, and knows the most proper Methods for accomplishing his designs, it must be good reasoning to say, " That a Religion was never designed by " God to produce good Effects, and be " vastly beneficial to Mankind which never " actually produc'd such Effects, and was " never thus beneficial, but the quite contrary." And therefore if Christianity has not actually been beneficial to the world, it has never been design'd by God to be so, and of consequence cannot be of God.

Now, after what I have observed already concerning the Difficulty in reasoning about what has actually followed on Christianity, and am to observe immediately concerning the native Effects of this Religion; it will be needless to spend any time upon the last of these Objections: for if all the Mischiefs that have attended Christianity be the natural Consequences of it, then the Question will come to this, Whether on the whole it has produced more Good or Evil? And this I have considered already: But if it shall be found that these Mischiefs are not the genuine Effects of Christianity, how numerous or great soever they may be suppos'd, it's nothing to the purpose: for as to what you alledge, " That God cannot be frustrated of " his good Purposes, and that you cannot " con-

“ conceive how a Religion should be inten-
 “ ded by Almighty God to be vast'y bene-
 “ ficial to Mankind, if in fact it is not thus be-
 “ ficial ;” it is sufficient to observe, that in
 one sense every thing that actually happens is
 designed by God, and in another sense only,
 that which is good: nor is there any difficulty
 in conceiving that a divine Institution, which
 God designs only for good, may by the
 Wickedness of Mankind be abus'd to bad
 Purposes, and be made the occasion of in-
 numerable Mischiefs and Calamities. This
 I can as easily conceive, as that there should
 be any Mischiefs or Calamities at all: and
 I am persuaded, this needs not be made
 plainer to a Gentleman of your capacity.
 And therefore the only thing that remains
 upon this head, is to consider, whether those
 Mischiefs that have followed on Christianity;
 are actually the natural Consequences of this
 Religion or not.

And here you assert, that these Mischiefs
 have arisen from the great stress which Chris-
 tianity lays upon mere Belief and Orthodoxy:
 “ From this Source have flowed all that bitter
 “ and implacable Hatred, Persecution and
 “ Bloodshed, with which the different Parties
 “ of Christians, inflamed with mad Zeal for
 “ their several Opinions, have raged against
 “ each other.” And this, if it was true,
 would be a strong Objection against this Re-
 ligion. But you was never more mistaken,

than in imagining these Mischiefs to be the natural Effects of Christianity: and this proceeds from your not distinguishing Christianity as it has been many times professed and established in the World, from Christianity as it is left us in the New Testament. If indeed you had said, that many Christians, or even that the greatest part of Christians, had laid too much stress upon mere Belief and Orthodoxy; I had agreed with you, and confessed that this among other things has been a great Source of Persecutions and Bloodshed, and all kinds of Mischief: but I cannot allow, that such a stress is laid upon mere Belief and Orthodoxy in the Writings of the New Testament; on the contrary, they declare in express Terms, that mere Belief and Orthodoxy is of no value. I do not chuse to go to a detail, and to insist on particular Passages: however, there is one Passage so express, that I shall set it down complete in your View. James ii. 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20. *What doth it profit, my Brethren, tho' a Man say he hath Faith, and have not Works? Can Faith save him? If a Brother or Sister be naked and destitute of daily Food, and one of you say unto them, depart in peace, be ye warm'd and fill'd, notwithstanding you give them not those things which are needful for the Body; what doth it profit? Even so Faith, if it has not Works, is dead, being alone: Yea, a Man may say, thou hast Faith,*

Faith, and I have Works; shew me thy Faith without thy Works, and I will shew thee my Faith by my Works. Thou believest that there is one God, thou dost well; the Devils also believe and tremble: but wilt thou know, O vain Man, that Faith without Works is dead.

But I will refer it to every Man who reads the New Testament, if it is not the very End and Design of Christianity to make Men virtuous and good; and if it be not declar'd in very clear Terms, that the strongest Degrees of Faith, without this Virtue and Goodness, shall never avail to Salvation. This has been frequently demonstrated by Christian Divines, to whom I refer you; and I am surprized how any Man can doubt of it, who has read the New Testament with care. I think if ever any Institution undervalued mere Belief and Orthodoxy, the Christian does: for whatever stress it lays on Faith which works by Love and promotes good Works, certainly it lays no stress on *Faith without Works*; which I take to be the same with *mere Faith*. I shall not indeed deny, but it proposes some things to our assent; but, as plainly appears, with a design to excite us to Virtue and Goodness.

But perhaps it's the ground of your Quarrel, that it proposes any thing at all to be believ'd by us, and does not rest entirely on
Morals.

Morals : and when you find fault with Christianity for laying stress upon mere Faith and Orthodoxy, you do not so much understand that it lays a stress upon Faith without Works, as that it may be said to lay stress upon both; since it not only enjoins us to be virtuous, but calls us to embrace such Doctrines as it proposes to our Assent. But I cannot see how this could be otherwise, when the Design of Christianity, as I have observ'd, *pag. 25.* of my Sermon (and I cannot find I am mistaken) " is not so much
 " to give us general Notions of what is
 " right and wrong, and what in general is
 " acceptable unto God, for it rather sup-
 " poses this is in a great measure known
 " already; as to give us a distinct View of
 " our present Circumstances as guilty, and
 " what is necessary for us, considering our
 " Guilt and our Crimes." Now I cannot see how a Design of this nature can be brought about without laying down some Propositions concerning our present Condition, and the Methods of Providence with relation to the guilty. These indeed it calls us to believe; and must not every Religion, Heathen or Christian, ancient or modern, call us to believe something? This is equally true of natural Religion, and of all the Religions of the Pagans. *He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

ALSTON

Nor

Nor will any Man worship *Apollo*, who believes nothing about *Apollo*; nor can we in any case be influenced by a Religion, without believing its Doctrines. There were *Credenda* in the ancient Religions, as well as in the Christian: and whether you will allow, that these *Credenda* were enjoin'd by Authority or not, it was certainly dangerous, on several occasions, to deny or despise, or to be accused of denying some of the Principles that were commonly received. You have an instance of this in the case of *Socrates*, whose Accusation ran in these terms*: " *Socrates* is criminal, because he acknowledges not the Gods that the Republick acknowledges, and because he introduces new Deities; he is further criminal, because he corrupts the Youth:" and for this he was condemned. And was not *Diagoras* cited by the *Athenians* to answer for his religious Opinions, and a Price set on his Head when he did not appear? Yea, the Zeal of the *Athenians* against this Philosopher rose to such a pitch, that they offered a Reward to any who would bring him in dead or alive†. But I need not insist upon particular Instances: I'll bring you an unexceptionable Witness of the Zeal of the Heathens in matters of Religion; no less an Author than the Earl

* *Xenoph. Memorab. Socrat. L. 1. init.*

† *Suid. & Cic. de N. D.*

Earl of *Shaftesbury*. This noble Author*, tho' he observes, that the Spirit of Bigotry and Persecution raged more violently in Christian times than ever it had done before, yet he doth not deny, that there were religious Antipathies and Aversions among heathen Worshipers, and that the heathen Religions had been the occasion of Strife and Discord, according to these Verses of *Juvenal*, in his 5th Satire;

—— *Summus utrinque*
Inde furor vulgo, quod numina vicinorum
Odit uterque locus, quum solos credat ha-
bendos
Esse Deos quos ipse colit ——

And if you read the rest of that Satire, you will easily perceive, that Religion has been the Occasion of barbarous Cruelties among Pagans as well as Christians. It's too much Partiality, if we imagine that the times of Paganism were wholly exempted from Persecution: there have been vigorous Prosecutions for Heterodoxy in heathen States, and heathen Mobs have been outrageous against those of a false Religion. In short, Bigotry flows from the Weakness and Imperfection of human Nature, and it has appear'd more or less in all Ages and Places, and under all Religions; if it has raged more in latter Ages, this

* See Pages 59, 60, 61, 80, 81, 82, 83, of the third Volume of his *Characteristicks*, printed in the Year 1723.

this is owing to accidental Circumstances, and not to the Genius of the Christian Religion.

For whatever stress Christianity lays upon believing, and tho' we suppose that it makes Faith to be more necessary than any Christian ever imagin'd; it must be confess'd at the same time, that there is nothing more contrary to the Genius and Precepts of the Christian Religion than Persecution for Conscience sake, or propagating the Faith by Violence and Force, and raising Disturbance in Society on the account of Religion. I confess indeed, that many Christians have departed from the only Methods their Religion enjoins or allows, and have made use of very unlawful Means to propagate what they took to be Christianity; to the disturbance of Peace, and spoiling of good Neighbourhood: but this practice of theirs is entirely contrary to the true Spirit and genuine Character of the Christian Religion; which allows of no Methods for the Propagation of the Faith, but the calm and gentle ones of Reason and Argument, and the Force of a good Example. Killing, Torturing, Banishments, Imprisonments, Confiscations, and all other tyrannical Methods of obliging to an outward Profession, when it is impossible to force the inward Assent,

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are intirely contrary to the Commands of our Saviour and the Apostles; who have enjoined Charity and mutual Forbearance in the warmest Terms, and laid us under the strongest Ties, to distinguish ourselves by loving one another and all Mankind, and living peaceably both among ourselves and with all Men.

And therefore without entering into any Dispute about the stress which Christianity lays on believing, or upon what accounts any Stress is laid on it, and supposing this Stress to be as great as you please; since at the same time it enjoins Charity and mutual Forbearance in the strongest Terms, and forbids all Methods of propagating the Faith by violence and force, commanding us to live peaceably with Heathens as well as Christians, to do all friendly Offices to all the World, and raise no Disturbance on the account of our Religion; it will be evident, that the Bloodshed and Persecutions you complain of, can never be imputed to Christianity. For tho' we allow, that among other things the Opinion which has been entertained of the necessity of Faith, has been an Occasion of much Violence and Contention among Christians, who have been encourag'd to this Violence by the Con-

Consequences they have drawn from this Principle; and tho' the Strictness of some Establishments, which has been also owing in some measure to such a Notion, has had most mischievous Effects: yet since the Consequences by which such Christians have been encourag'd to violence, are not only inconclusive in themselves, but directly contrary to the most plain and positive Precepts of the Christian Religion; this is sufficient to make it appear, that Violence and Force in matters of Religion, and all the Methods of propagating the Faith that tend to disturb the World, and mar the Peace and good Neighbourhood, are so far from being the genuine Effects of Christianity, that they are a manifest Abuse and perverting of its Design, and are wholly to be charg'd on such particular Christians, or Societies of Christians, as have maintained or established them.

I come now to examine what you have advanced about *Positive Institutions*, on which you spend the greatest part of your Letter. And here I may observe, that in effect you grant me all I contended for; which was only the Possibility of such *Positive Institutions*, in opposition to the Author of *Christianity as old as the Creation*; who had asserted, that there could be nothing of a positive Nature

in Religion. For you allow, “ that there
 “ may possibly be a Foundation for *Positive*
 “ *Institutions* in the Nature of things;
 “ and that there may be need for Rules,
 “ the Reason of which we are wholly ig-
 “ norant of: but you pretend, that this is
 “ wide of the present Dispute; and you
 “ want to learn how the use of *Positive*
 “ *Institutions* can possibly take place,
 “ with respect to such general Rules, by
 “ which the rational Mind is to attain a
 “ Sense of Religion and Virtue, or to be-
 “ come better disposed for the Practice
 “ of them.” Now if I can give you Sa-
 tisfaction in this point, it will perhaps
 bring the Dispute on this head to a De-
 cision.

And here I will grant you, that in the
 Observation of positive Rules, it is not by
 what is positive that the rational Mind at-
 tains a sense of Religion and Virtue, but only
 by what is moral; or, to express myself
 in another way, it is not immediately, but
 mediately, that positive Rules have an in-
 fluence to make us truly virtuous. For
 instance, we do not become virtuous by
 worshipping God rather every seventh day
 than every tenth, (and this is all that is
 positive;) but by feeling a lively sense of
 Goodness, and being warmly affected with
 generous and divine Sentiments. And this
 holds

holds equally in all *Positive Institutions* whatsoever ; whose influence to reform us, does not flow from the bare external Observance, but from their Tendency to excite in us virtuous and devout Sentiments, and awaken in us such excellent Thoughts, as in a natural and rational manner tend to our moral Improvement. And notwithstanding your bold Assertion, “ That instances might be given of Means being appointed by the Christian Religion, and enjoined in order to religious Improvement, where not only no connexion can be discovered betwixt the Means and the End proposed, but where no Reflection can be supposed to follow : ” I will venture to affirm, on the other hand, that no such instance can be given ; which is all the answer I think proper to such a general unsupported Assertion.

And now, if you ask me the use of what is positive, since it tends not immediately to our improvement in Virtue ; I answer, that as in general we ought to preserve a religious and virtuous disposition, during the whole course of our lives ; so it is useful for this purpose, that we be excited to the Love of God and Mankind, at particular Seasons, and by means of particular Rites and Observations : all
which

which Rites and Observations, in so far as God hath appointed them, are adjusted with the greatest Wisdom and Prudence, and excellently adapted to the circumstances of those for whom they are calculated and ordained. And this being the case, I cannot see the justness of your raillery on this subject, nor what foundation there is for your conceit, about “ our growing in the Love of God and our Neighbour, in a way of *Hocus-pocus*, “ and improving in Grace and Virtue by “ a quack-like Receipt;” since Christianity gives not any handle for such a Representation. I grant indeed, that it’s impossible to defend the nonsense and absurdities of some particular Christians, who maintain very extravagant Opinions concerning *Positive Institutions*; nor shall I ever condemn the ridiculing what truly deserves it: yet a Ridicule wrong placed, is in itself ridiculous; nor is there any difficulty in defending what Christianity teaches, about Institutions of a positive Nature.

But before I conclude what I have to say about the method in which we are influenced to Goodness, I would observe, That tho’ Christians can account for the use of *Positive Institutions*, and in observing them
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may be very naturally influenced to Virtue and Goodness; yet they do not believe, that there can be no improvements in Virtue, but what may be called natural. On the contrary, they believe that a supernatural assistance may be maintained without any absurdity, or giving ground to compare it, as you seem to do, to the virtue of *Hocus-pocus*. That a supernatural Assistance is possible, you acknowledge yourself, when you allow, "That God may annex to such a circumstance, as one's dipping his Finger in water at three of the clock in the Afternoon on *Thursday*, this miraculous effect, that the Man should afterwards find himself much improved in Grace and Virtue." Nor have you any reason to ridicule all such improvements, and compare them to quack-like Receipts; for as you own yourself, that such Improvements are possible, I shall show you that there is nothing unreasonable in supposing them actually to be.

I shall suppose what you will not deny, that the present state of Mankind is very imperfect, that our Reason is weak, and our Passions and Appetites after the Things of Sense are strong, (many times, alas! too strong for our Reason, and able to overcome it;) I would say more, if I was to tell you all my own Sentiments on this Subject:

Subject : but it is needless, and I will not ask you to allow any thing but what I am certain you will not deny. For this reason, I will not desire you to grant me, that we are in such a condition, that it's impossible for our Reason, in a natural way, to correct every irregular Appetite and Desire, and to reduce every thing within us to a due subjection. I shall only suppose, that it is extremely difficult for us to do this by all the Methods we can use ; and I am certain, you will not deny it. Now if this is the case, must it not be owned, that it's so far from being absurd or ridiculous for God to assist us in this conflict of Reason against Passion, in a supernatural way, when it is so hard and difficult for our Reason to stand its ground in a natural way ; that it is exceeding kind in him to do it, and what we should reckon a mighty favour ? And if God should declare by any Revelation, that he will afford us this supernatural Assistance, in a manner suitable to his infinite Wisdom and Goodness ; I cannot think there is any absurdity in this, or that in this case any Man has reason to say, " That the Blessing of a virtuous Mind, and religious Disposition, more valuable than all the Goods of Fortune, was disposed of in a random way." And

And thus a supernatural Improvement in Virtue, may be agreeable both to Wisdom and Goodness.

I need not detain you long in making Remarks on your Observations about a Day for publick Worship, since they do not in the least weaken what I had advanced. I grant you, that true Worship, or rather, the most substantial part of Worship, is internal, and consists in an inward Sense of the Divine Perfections; and especially of the moral Perfections of the Divine Nature. I grant you, that no precise Measure of Time can answer all the cases of Mankind, and allow you to call the fixing of the Time for publick Worship a serving only political purposes. But notwithstanding all this, there may be a particular Day, such as every seventh, which in general is more convenient to be observed than any other, though the particular Circumstances of great numbers on some seventh Day, may render it impossible for them to assemble with any religious Meeting: and whether you call the fixing of this Day a serving of political purposes, or not; it is evident it serves the purposes of religious Worship, as much as fixing the Time for any other Affair serves the purposes of that Affair.

I hasten to consider the three Doctrines which depend upon positive Revelation.

The first, that " Mens Bodies are to be raised from their Graves, and to share with their Souls in endless Bliss or Misery." The second, that " the future Judgment of Mankind is to be attended with certain Circumstances of Solemnity." And the third, " that God will pardon Sinners upon their Repentance." And of the first two Doctrines you confess, that they depend upon Circumstances of a positive Nature, but what are very inconsiderable: the last Doctrine you own to be considerable, but maintain strenuously, that it's taught by the Light of Nature, and that Revelation cannot make it clearer.

Let us examine what you advance on both these heads.

And first, you pretend that the Doctrines of a future State, and of a just Retribution of Rewards and Punishments in this future State, are commonly looked upon as Principles of natural Religion. I shall not deny but they are, or at least, that they are reckoned such by very able Men, who have done great Service to Christianity. But supposing this, you do not pretend that the Resurrection of the Body is to be

be discovered in this manner : and this, I say, is a considerable Circumstance. For besides that we have a natural Aversion to a separate State, of which we can scarce form any Notion ; the more particular any Accounts are, they make the more lively Impressions upon us. I shall not indeed dispute what you assert, " That there is no Happiness or Misery, of which a Man is capable by means of his Body, but what he may as well enjoy or suffer without it." But supposing it is really as you assert, it's certain the bulk of Mankind have no such Notion, but firmly believe, that they are capable of extraordinary Measures of Happiness and Misery by means of the Body, which they are not capable of without it ; and therefore the Resurrection of the Body must have a considerable Influence on the great Body of Mankind.

I say the same with respect to the Solemnity of the future Judgment : for tho' we suppose that the Light of Nature discovers in general, that there shall be a just Retribution of Rewards and Punishments in a future State ; yet the more particular and circumstantial Accounts we have of the manner in which these Rewards and Punishments shall be distributed, the more lively Impressions will

they make. And it's certainly a considerable Favour, if God shall reveal unto us such Circumstances of the Judgment to come, as have a natural Tendency to make the most lively Impressions upon us, and render us most careful of our Behaviour. External Show and pompous Appearance are thought very proper in the Administration of Justice in this World: and I cannot see but they may be fully as proper in a future State; since the Persons to be judged are the very same, and tho' considerable Changes will be made in their Constitution, yet since they are to have Bodies, sensible things must make Impressions upon them as well as they do upon us. And I do not think, but *those of my Communion,* * and of all other *Communities*, notwithstanding their differences about the Pomp of Worship, will agree in this, that Solemnity in administering Justice is very proper, and that the Discovery of this is apt to make strong Impressions on our Minds.

But before I leave this Subject, I would observe, that whatever may be discover'd by the Light of Nature concerning a future State of Rewards and Punishments, the noblest Circumstance of this Doctrine depends upon positive Revelation. The
utmost

* Pag. 15.

utmost length to which the Light of Nature can pretend to go, is to assure us, that we are not to perish wholly at death: but that the Soul shall survive the Ruins of the Body, and enter into an immortal State, in which we shall be placed in such Circumstances as shall bear a proportion and be suitable to our Behaviour and Attainments in this World. If Reason can discover all these Truths, which is not universally acknowledged, I am certain that it cannot pretend to any more: and if we want to go further in our Enquiry into the Nature of the future State; if we want to determine the Proportion, or calculate how far superior the future State shall be to the present, whether the Happiness of it may be said to be complete, or whether we may not be expos'd to many Inconveniencies in it, as we are frequently in this Life; Reason leaves us at a loss, and can furnish us with nothing but Guesses and Conjectures. It's only by a Revelation that we are assured, that virtuous Men shall be deliver'd from all Pains and Inconveniencies whatsoever, and that their Happiness shall be perfect and complete. It's only JESUS CHRIST who hath reveal'd the pure Joys of the other World, and brought such amazing Glories to light. A much smaller and more imper-

imperfect State of Happiness than Jesus hath reveal'd, might answer all the Designs of God, and set the Affairs of Providence upon an equal footing, as far as Reason can pretend to judge; and the heavenly Kingdom to which Christians are called to aspire, is only revealed by the Gospel. And thus the noblest additional Motives to Virtue, the strongest Supports to it when feeble and sinking, and the firmest Props under all our Pressures in general, depend upon Revelation.

But e'er I go further, I must take notice of a Remark you have made on a Paragraph of my Preface, *pag. 9, 10.* "That
 " as rational Creatures may be negligent
 " or vicious, and thus bring themselves
 " into such a condition, as may render the
 " measures they are to follow very dark
 " and obscure, or in some cases absolutely
 " uncertain; so notwithstanding the Good-
 " ness of God, he may leave them to con-
 " tinue in such circumstances at least for a
 " time." Now upon this you observe, that the Caution I insert in these words, "at least for a time," destroys the reasoning: for by adding these words, "at least for a time," I seem to acknowledge, that if the distress into which rational Creatures might be reduced through Ignorance of Positive Instructions, affected their whole
 I Concerns

concerns, and was to endure for ever, the Case could not be so well defended. Perhaps so ; since doubtless it's easier in many cases to account for a smaller than a greater Evil, and for Distresses that endure for a time, than such as endure for ever : but how does this destroy a reasoning concerning the distresses of rational Creatures, that were neither supposed to affect their whole concerns, nor to endure for ever ? For if you consider the Passage more narrowly, you will perceive, that I determined nothing either about the Intensity or Duration of the Distresses into which rational Creatures might be reduced through ignorance of Positive Instructions ; nor indeed was there any necessity : for the whole design of that and some preceding Paragraphs was only in general, and without pretending to a particular discussion of all circumstances, to make it out against the Author of *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, that it was possible there might be *Positive Institutions* in Religion, or Rules proper to be observed, which some rational Creatures could not discover. And this may easily be perceived by any Man, who thinks it worth while to examine the Passage. I observed indeed, that the least that could be allowed, was, that God might suffer rational Creatures to continue
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in such Distresses as they had reduced themselves into through their Vices and Negligence, at least for a time ; and had no occasion to be more particular.

But, in the next place, suppose I had gone further, and had asserted that the Distresses into which rational Creatures might reduce themselves thro' their Vices and Negligence, might continue for ever ; I do not find that this is what you attack, or that you have ventured to assert, that in all cases it's inconsistent with infinite Wisdom and Goodness, that the Distresses into which rational Creatures are reduced, should continue for ever. But whenever you touch upon this Argument, you insert some particular Clause, which makes the case very different. For instance, when you say, *pag.* 16. " That to assert
 " the possibility of rational Creatures being
 " suffered to fall into such Distresses, as
 " shall endure for ever, and in such a way
 " that they could never have prevented
 " it, is in a very direct manner to deny the
 " Justice and Goodness of God." And again, " What good and wise Ends can be
 " gained, by suffering Creatures to fall
 " into misery, which they never had any
 " means to evite, and to continue in that
 " state for ever?" And again, *pag.* 17.
 " Let me know therefore the profitable
 " Lessons

“ Lessons which such an Example of
 “ everlasting Misery, as is inflicted upon
 “ such as could not possibly avoid the
 “ same, can teach their Fellow-Creatures.”

Again, *pag.* 20. when you speak of the absurdity of eternal Punishments, “ It is
 “ a remediless and endless Misery, arising
 “ from the slightest transgression, and which
 “ one could never avoid.” Now this is very different from asserting the absurdity of eternal Punishments in all cases, even those of the most abandoned and obstinately vicious Characters: and before you go this length, I would advise you to consider the difficulty of the Proof; since you will be obliged to show, that the universal Governour of the whole rational System, whose Views are infinitely extended beyond our scanty measure, can never see it for the universal good, to leave a certain number of obstinate and perverse sinners, originally designed for Immortality, but who have abused all the powers and advantages with which they have been blessed, to that Misery, which is the native consequence of their Vices and Crimes. In the mean time, I am not a little surprized at your method of representing my Scheme; as when you assert, *pag.* 16. “ That I suppose the politick Ends
 “ of Government, or the Benefit arising
 G “ from

“ from an useful Example, may require a
 “ dispensation of this kind: namely, a dis-
 “ pensation in which Creatures are con-
 “ demn'd to eternal Misery which they
 “ never had any means to evite.” This
 is what I have neither asserted nor sup-
 posed, nor is there any such Doctrine in
 Christianity, which does not teach us that
 Mankind will be condemned to suffer Pu-
 nishments in another Life, for their not be-
 ing blessed with a Revelation, which God
 did not see proper to afford them; but
 for their transgressing the Rules they might
 have known, and neglecting to live ac-
 cording to the Light they had: for according
 to the Christian Revelation, Rom. ii. 6, 7,
 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. *God will judge the World
 in Righteousness: He will render to every
 Man according to his deeds; to them who
 by a patient continuing in well-doing seek
 for glory, and honour, and immortality,
 eternal life: but unto them that are con-
 tentious, and do not obey the truth, but
 obey unrighteousness, indignation and
 wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every
 soul of man that doth evil, of the Jew
 first, and also of the Gentile. But glory,
 honour, and peace, to every man that
 worketh good; to the Jew first, and also
 to the Gentile: for there is no respect of
 persons with God; for as many as have
 sinned*

sinned without Law, shall also perish without Law; and as many as have sinned in the Law, shall be judged by the Law. This is a plain decision of the case, and to this all Christians will stand. And when I had affirmed nothing contrary to this; yea, not so much as the possibility of Punishments in the cases you suppose, (tho' a great many things are possible that shall never actually come to pass) I cannot think you have done well, in representing me in this manner.

I come now to defend what I asserted, that by the Light of Nature we cannot discover in what manner God is to deal with the Guilty. This is a point on which I laid a great stress, and still think it very clear: but as you are very positive, on the other hand, I shall examine what you have advanced with all the attention and impartiality I am able.

And here it will be necessary to state the Question accurately; that we may perceive the precise difference in our Sentiments, and if possible bring the case to a decision. I will therefore confess, that if we have no Revelation, it is the most natural conclusion, that God will pardon such as truly repent; and will not for ever deny

us his Grace, if we have recollected and are truly recovered from our Errors: and if any thing I had said were contrary to this, I would fairly retract it, But I cannot find any thing of this kind, either in the Sermon or Preface. There is one * passage indeed, in which I have not expressed myself so accurately as I should have done; for when I assert, that it is but a Conjecture, that God will pardon on Repentance and Reformation, and that we may form Conjectures on the other hand; I ought to have distinguished betwixt what God will do immediately upon our Repentance, and what he may be supposed to do afterwards. For indeed it appears to me to be a very natural conclusion, that if we truly repent and reform, God will pardon at last: but I cannot see a greater probability, that he will do this immediately upon our Repentance, or immediately after Death: I think we are absolutely uncertain as to the time; and, as far as we can see, it may be agreeable to the most natural and just Order of things, that such as have transgressed, be condemned to a long and intense punishment in another world, before they are restored to happiness and bliss: and it may be necessary for the Deity, in the Capacity of a Governour and Judge, notwithstanding his infinite Goodness, to keep them at a distance,

* Sermon, pag. 11.

distance, tho' they see the evil of their ways, and have actually attain'd as high measures of Repentance as Men commonly attain in this World. And therefore as this of necessity must make us anxious, so there is a necessity of a Revelation to free us from this anxiety, and to open the Counsels of Heaven concerning the Guilty.

Now if you would contradict me, you must assert the contrary, that by the Light of Nature it is certain, or at least most probable, that if Transgressors are truly penitent, and have renounced their Crimes, God will pardon them, and will not punish them for their Sins which they have recollected and from which they are recovered. And this indeed you assert, *pag.* 18. But to make all plainer, you must assert further, that Reason assures us, or makes it most probable, that God will not punish them for any considerable Length of Time, nor in any high Degree. If the Light of Nature cannot determine this, it is not sufficient to free us from Anxiety; since there are none but will be anxious about Punishments that may be very intense, and continue long. Now here is the precise Question betwixt you and me; and, as I said before in the Sermon, that I would venture the whole Cause upon this single point, I say the same thing
still;

still: and if you shall make it appear, that the Goodness of God obliges Him immediately to pardon a Sinner, who is recovered from his Errors; and that God cannot, in consistency with his Goodness, punish such a Sinner in another World for a great Length of Time, and in a high Degree; I will acknowledge I was much in the wrong: but if you cannot make this appear, I hope you will be as ready to acknowledge that I have established a Necessity of a Revelation; to open to us a more clear, satisfying and comfortable View of the Counsels of Heaven, with respect to the Guilty, than Reason affords.

Well then, let us consider what you advance in this View; and there are four Propositions, you endeavour to prove, which I shall consider in order.

First, You maintain that “ what I call
 “ a Conjecture, is really and in strict Ac-
 “ count a Demonstration; if I will admit
 “ the use of that Name in Morality;
 “ and that we need no other Assurance,
 “ nor can receive any greater, than what
 “ Reason affords us.” Now to demon-
 strate, that God will not punish us for
 such Errors as we have recollected and
 from which we are recovered, you assert that
 God punishes his Creatures only for their
 good

good, and that this good can mean nothing but the good of the Party punish'd, or of others who may profit by the Example; and that the Person suffering, cannot receive any other Benefit from the Punishment, than that of being reclaim'd from his Errors, and fortified against them for the time to come. Well, I ask no more, but that the fortifying a Sinner for the time to come, is a proper End of Punishment: for is it not evident from this, that Punishments after death may be necessary, to make a more lively Impression upon the Sinner's Mind, that feeling so much of the Bitterness of Sin, he may be the more strongly fortified against it in the after-part of his Existence. Here is a most excellent Design, that a Being of infinite Wisdom and Goodness may have in view, with respect to the Sinner himself; and pray how can Reason determine, that this may not be the Case? For it's certain, that a much stronger Motive is laid before a rational Creature to abstain from Sin, when he sees that he cannot be forgiven immediately on his Repentance, than if he should find that, whatever is the Nature of his Crimes, as soon as he repents, he shall be deliver'd from the Punishment. And thus the punishing a Sinner after he is penitent, may be of great use to the
Sinner

Sinner himself; and therefore, according to your own Account, it may be profitable to others.

To strengthen your Assertion, you observe, That if Reason does not teach us that God will pardon us immediately upon our Repentance, (for this you must assert, or it is nothing to the purpose) we are left to an endless Anxiety; which God cannot suffer, since he is a good Being. But this is a very unsafe Way of arguing; and you might plead with equal Reason, that because God is a good Being, all Men might enjoy all things that are needful for their private Good. If indeed you would hold it in the general, and argue that because God is infinitely Good, Wise, and Powerful, every Man shall be bless'd with every thing that is good for him, as far as this is consistent with the general Good; this would not be deny'd. But it is a false inference, that because God is a good Being, every Man, or Mankind in general, shall obtain every thing that might be reckoned good for them in particular, without regard to the general or universal Good: for this in many cases is contrary to what experience teaches us.

Here therefore let us again consider what reason can actually conclude in this matter, abstracting from any positive Revelation,

velation, without pretending to know more than we really do, or taking our measures about what Reason really concludes, from what we may imagine it ought to be able to conclude. As we know by the Light of Nature, that we often and much transgress the strict and perfect Rules of Action ; so we know that there is an infinitely Wise, Good and Powerful Being, who is the Governour of the World, and will deal with us in a way suitable to infinite Wisdom and Goodness. We know likewise, that it's suitable to the highest Wisdom and Goodness to punish us in another World, for the Sins of which we have been guilty in the present Life, if we do not sincerely repent : and as we never repent so sincerely, as not to fall into Sin afterwards, this circumstance throws us into uncertainty ; and we cannot determine the influence it will have on our condition hereafter ; whether God will place us in a happier State immediately after death, or punish us in another Life for our transgressions in this World. Nature's Light teaches us no more, but that an infinitely wise and good Being will make all just allowances, and consider all circumstances. It does not indeed lead us to utter despair ; on the contrary, while we believe the Being of a God, infinite in Wisdom, Goodness and

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Power,

Power, we never ought to despair; but endeavour to repent and reform, and trust to his Mercy: but yet while we have no certainty, nor any probable Scheme about the Methods of Providence after death, we are and must be anxious till we know something more than Reason can teach us. And tho' this Anxiety is not Despair, the uncertainty of such a condition must be very uneasy, if a Man be duly concerned about his own condition, and the circumstances of Human Nature. I cannot therefore agree with you, that a Man is not to be esteemed more miserable for this anxiety. Perhaps, indeed, this anxiety may upon the whole be an advantage; as it's better when a Man wants a divine Revelation, that he be suitably concerned about his circumstances than otherwise; in which sense he is not indeed more miserable, than if he wanted that anxiety while he has no assurance from Heaven to free him of it: but certainly it would be better for him to be freed from this anxiety; and a Revelation is necessary to inform him what are to be the Methods of Providence after death, and to determine in those cases in which Reason leaves us to uncertainty and anxiety, though it does not lead to utter despair.

Now

Now this being the true state of the Argument, I need not spend much time upon your second Proposition; "That
 " the persuasion of the Pardon of Sin upon
 " Repentance, which is attainable by the
 " use of Reason, is equally certain with
 " that of the Divine Goodness; that if the
 " one be conjectural, so is the other."

For I have already proven, that this Principle, That God will pardon Sinners immediately upon their Repentance, and without punishing them after they are penitent, (for I must still put you in mind, that this is what you must maintain) is not a plain Consequence from the supposition of the Divine Goodness, nor more probable than the contrary. And since this is the case, whatever evidence we have for the Goodness of God, and whether we are able to Demonstrate it in the strictest sense, or believe it only upon numerous Probabilities, it makes no alteration in this Subject. For the Question is not about the Goodness of God, which is owned on all hands; but we are enquiring what we can infer from the Goodness of God about the acceptance of Sinners immediately upon their Repentance: and I have shown, that no certain conclusion can be drawn to that purpose, that there is even as great a probability on the one side as on the other; in short, that

this is a Subject not to be determined by Reason. And this is vastly different from our conclusions about the Divine Goodness; for which, according to your own representation, there are numerous Probabilities on the one side, and only a Possibility to the contrary: at least this is all the length you think fit to carry it, in your Letter; for all that you have advanced, amounts to no more than this, that notwithstanding the Evidence for the Divine Goodness from numerous Probabilities, yet it's possible in some sense, that in the main, or sum of things, Evil may prevail: and though you should carry it further; and alledge, that this is not only possible, but that there are several circumstances in the Conduct of Providence, which, considered separately, would incline us to believe, that the supreme Governour of the World is not infinitely Good; yet this would not make for your purpose, unless you assert, which I am persuaded you never will, that there is as great a probability that he is evil or malicious, as that he is good. For I have made it appear in the other case, that considering the present Sins of Men, and the highest measure of Repentance they attain, it's fully as probable, that God will punish us after Death; as that he will receive us into his favour, and place

place us immediately in a State of Happiness and Bliss. Such is the case with respect to the pardon of Sinners upon their Repentance: but our Belief of the divine Goodness rests upon a very different Foundation: for there are so many powerful Reasons to persuade us, that the supreme Governor of the World is infinitely good, that whether you will allow them to amount to a Demonstration or not, I am persuaded one has as little reason to doubt of the divine Goodness, as of any one Truth in the World. But I need not insist on such a Subject, because I take it to be none of your design, and quite foreign to your purpose, to weaken the Belief of the divine Goodness.

I come now to consider your third Proposition, which you infer from the two preceding, "That the Belief of any Revelation cannot possibly contain a greater Degree of Certainty of the Pardon of Sin upon Repentance, than is attainable by the Use of Reason."

Now if you remember that I have shown, that Reason leaves us uncertain in this matter; if there can be a Revelation at all, which you will not deny, this Revelation must make us more certain, or it is not a Revelation at all. And tho' I should grant you, that there has not been any Revelation

lation hitherto afforded us, the Evidence of which amounts to a Demonstration, this will not make for your purpose ; since there may be sufficient Evidence, where we have not any Demonstration. And therefore all your Arguments upon this head are beside the Question ; for it is not sufficient to shew, that it's possible we may be deceived, and the Evidence of a Revelation does not amount to a Demonstration : for though this be granted you, the Evidence it affords us may be sufficient to convince any reasonable Man, and to free us from Anxiety in those very cases in which Reason leaves us to Uncertainty.

I proceed to your fourth Proposition,
 “ That allowing the perswasion of the pardon
 “ of Sin upon Repentance, attainable by
 “ the Use of Reason, to be founded only
 “ on conjecture ; it cannot justly subject
 “ our Minds to any troublesome Anxiety
 “ or Solicitude, from which we can be
 “ freed by a Revelation.” And here a
 great part of your Reasoning is already
 overthrown : for I have not only shewn,
 that it's possible that God may not immediately pardon the Penitent ; but that there is as great a probability on this side, as on the other. And therefore notwithstanding all the Discoverys of Reason, there is room for a troublesome Anxiety, which
 may

may justify a wise Man in desiring a miraculous Testimony, if it could possibly be obtained.

Nor is there any strength in this Plea,
 “ That a Revelation itself cannot deliver
 “ us from this Anxiety ; that its Declara-
 “ tions are only in general in favour of
 “ the Penitent, and every particular Per-
 “ son has as much reason as ever to doubt
 “ about the Sincerity of his Repentance,
 “ and whether he has a title to pardon ;
 “ nor can he be relieved of these Doubts
 “ in any other method, than by rational
 “ Conjectures about the Nature of his Re-
 “ pentance, or by a personal Assurance
 “ which may be called a Revelation made
 “ to him in particular ; and without this
 “ particular Revelation, there is not any
 “ advantage, of which Christians can boast
 “ beyond others.”

For is not this an advantage, that Christians enjoy above others, that they are in general certain of the Designs of Heaven, while others cannot be certain of so much. Christians indeed may doubt of the Sincerity of their Repentance ; but in this they have only one ground of doubting, when the Deists have two ; and so the Christian has still the advantage of the Deist.

Nor can it be asserted, that this one ground of doubting is enough to make them

them fully as anxious as the Deists, who have two: for if a Christian be careful to lead a pious and virtuous Life, though he cannot have an infallible assurance without a supernatural Assistance, yet he may have such comfortable hopes as are sufficient to quiet his Mind. If indeed he is guilty of many gross Failings, I confess, he has good reason to doubt; and it would be very absurd, that a Man of such a Character should be in any other condition: but if he be careful to live as a good and virtuous Man, he may be satisfied, "That God will not narrowly mark his Iniquities against him, and that with God there is mercy that he may be feared." And this may afford him inward Quiet, and deliver him from his Anxiety; nor is an infallible Assurance necessary for the Comfort of our Lives.

And now I conclude, with my hearty Prayers to the Father of Lights, that he may enlighten your Mind; and if I shall be instrumental to remove any of your Scruples against the Christian Revelation, I have my end, and am,

S I R,

Your humble Servant, &c.

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